

Friday (A Carthusian)

If only we realised how we complicate life, when it really is so simple. All our troubles come from this: we do not know how to seek God where he is. We seek him far away and all the while he is quite close to us. 'In him we live and move and have our being.' The saints kept themselves before the face of the living God, and God communicated himself to them and lived in them. Truly, then, we can say that the divine life was generated in them, and became their life. And so it can be with us, even in our busiest moments. It is not necessary to seek the stillness of a sanctuary or of a special place to pray. All we need to do is make an act of faith and love: "My God, I believe in you, and I love you": A simple movement in the depths of our soul that we call forth from time to time.

Scripture (Colossians 2:6-10)

So then, as you received Jesus as Lord and Christ, now live your lives in him, be rooted in him and built up on him, held firm by the faith you have been taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving. Make sure that no one captivates you with the empty lure of a 'philosophy' of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and not on Christ. In him, in bodily form, lives divinity in all its fullness, and in him you too find your own fulfilment.

2nd Week of Easter

Easter continues. Pass it on

The frightened and defeated disciples locked in the room were, presumably, thinking in terms of survival and, if despondency and despair let them think further ahead, being able to make their way back to the obscurity of Galilee, (John 20:13-31). They could not begin to believe that what was about to happen in that room would expand to become the vibrant and growing community of Christians in Acts 4:32-35... and on to us in the present day.

Belief in the risen Jesus is the key to that change and growth, as seen in the transformation of the disciples and, of more interest to us, in Thomas' more difficult transformation (John 20:19-31). I don't think anyone could blame him for having doubts when he was told by his friends that Jesus had been with them while he was out – clearly a ridiculous story, and he quite reasonably says he will need to see and touch the wounds, (after all, the first thing Jesus did to the others was to reassure them by showing his hands and his side). The real issue is that Thomas' inability to believe continues for eight days, during which he must surely have noticed the transformation in the other disciples? He was more 'point blank refusing to budge Thomas' than 'doubting Thomas'.

The most important difference was that Jesus had breathed on the disciples saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit', at which point they were filled with the power of the risen Jesus. Thomas' mind could not make the leap to the risen Jesus, which the others had experienced in receiving the Spirit. Significantly, Jesus give the apostles the authority – his authority – to forgive or retain sins. In John's Gospel, the sin which he is concerned with throughout is the sin of unbelief, so Jesus is saying that those who had previously rejected him were to be forgiven; they hadn't 'missed the boat' by rejecting him before. This belief is not a formula to be said, or an idea to be worked out intellectually: it is a belief which transforms. 1 John 5:1-) explains how this is a consequence of belief. If we believe, we are children of God and will love his children. It is the transforming power of the risen Jesus, present in us through the Spirit, that allows us to love as he loved, as was clearly evident in the vibrant early church that was looked up to by everyone and growing in numbers, (Acts4:32-35). This poses the uncomfortable question for me (and the Church): why is your life not so transformed as to attract people to the Gospel? Before falling back on my usual excuses about the modern word being different, their lifestyle was out of step with their society and already they were facing strong opposition from the same Sanhedrin which had killed Jesus. The persecutions were already building up. The key to their dynamism lies in verse 31 which tells how the whole community prayed and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is a real challenge for those of us who profess the resurrection of Jesus, and who believe that we too receive the same Spirit in Confirmation: if people are not attracted to our belief then they are either Thomas, or we do not really believe, since belief must, if genuine and not simply words recited, lead to transformation. The key question, I suppose, is 'would I be more committed if Jesus appeared in person?' Unless the answer is 'no, I already have him', then I'd better keep quiet during the Creed. Martin Bennett

Monday (Timothy Radcliffe, OP)

This is, potentially, a wonderful moment for Christianity. If we are able to find ways to live and share our Christian hope, then we shall offer something for which the world is thirsting. Now, we have something extraordinary and rare to offer, which is hope stripped of its secular crutches, new and fresh and desirable. As Christians, we have no special economic or political insight into how this may be done, but we may perform signs that speak our hope. This requires of us imagination and boldness. If people see that Christians are prepared to make slightly crazy gestures, instead of always timidly drawing back because they might not work, or people might not like them, then they will catch the whiff of our extravagant hope.

Scripture (Acts 2:42-46)

The converts remained faithful to the teachings of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone.

Tuesday (John Main, OSB)

If we Christians fail today to proclaim the gospel of Jesus with sufficient conviction and enthusiasm, it is due above all to our forgetting that the very essence of our meaning is to exist for others. The church does not exist to perpetuate itself, to increase its own security. It exists to lead others into an awareness of the redemptive love of God in Jesus. If the world does not believe what we say about Jesus, what we say about the reality of the human spirit, is it not mainly because they do not believe we really believe it and know it?

Scripture (John 15:11-16)

I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Wednesday (The Epistle to Diognetus, 2nd century)

Christians are not distinguished from others by nationality or language or customs. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead an eccentric lifestyle, yet they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They are in the flesh, but do not live after the flesh. They obey the established laws, but surpass them in their private lives. They love all people, but are persecuted by all. They are dishonoured, yet are glorified in their very dishonour. They are insulted, yet repay the insult with honour. It was no merely earthly invention which was entrusted to them, nor is it a mere human system of opinion which they guard so carefully. But truly, God himself sent from heaven Him who is the truth and firmly established him in their hearts.

Scripture (Philippians 2:13-16)

It is God who, for his own generous purpose, gives you the intention and the powers to act. Let your behaviour be free of murmuring and complaining so that you remain faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God surrounded by a deceitful and underhand brood, shining out among them like bright stars in the world, proffering to it the Word of life.

Thursday (Ignatius of Antioch)

Regarding the rest of mankind, you should pray for them unceasingly, for we can always hope that repentance will enable them to find their way to God. Give them a chance to learn from you, or at all events from the way you act. Meet their animosity with mildness, their high words with humility and their abuse with your prayers. But stand firm against their errors. Let us show by our forbearance that we are their brothers and sisters.

Scripture (John 20:19-23)

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those sins you retain, they are retained.'